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GUEST: **John Langmore**
Director
Division for Social Policy and Development
United Nations

JOURNALISTS: Thalif Deen, Inter Press Service
Tony Jenkins, Expresso

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

YOUTH WORLD FORUM

Young adults make up twenty percent of the global population. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to develop specific national policies dealing with the participation of this group in our societies. Last August, the United Nations organized a youth summit where the concerns and aspirations of young people were discussed. John Langmore from the United Nations talks about the empowerment of young people and the role they play in human development.

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Executive Producer:	Chaim Litewski
Director:	Ivan Stoynov
Production Assistant:	Corazon A. Icasas

ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

There are 1.3 billion young people on our planet aged 15 to 24 making up one-fifth of the global population. They naturally aspire to full and productive lives. But a growing number of them face unemployment, insecure livelihoods, homelessness, social exclusion and ethnic prejudice. Last August, the Youth World Forum was convened in Braga, Portugal. A few days later, an international conference on youth policy opened in Lisbon. Representatives from more than one hundred and fifty countries attended.

Our guest today is John Langmore, Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development at the united Nations. This Division, together with the Portuguese Government, were the organizers of the events. He will be interviewed by Thalif Deen of *Inter Press Service* and Tony Jenkins of *Expresso* of Portugal.

Mr. Langmore, welcome to **World Chronicle.**

LANGMORE: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: John Langmore, it used to be said that never trust anyone over thirty. That used to be the mantra for the youth of the world. Now I see that you have set the limits at 15 to 24, which means that a rather famous lady who has been on the headlines from Washington lately, is already over the hill. How do you arrive at these limitations -- 15 to 24?

LANGMORE: Any ages are arbitrary but pretty clearly there are characteristics of people aged 15 to early 20's which they have in common and their particular contributions they can make in particular needs they have and so it is an arbitrary grouping. You have to have precise limits in order to gather the statistics and clarify what their characteristics are.

LITTLEJOHNS: And the delegates who attended these sessions in Portugal, were they all within that age range?

LANGMORE: No, they were not. At the World Youth Forum in Braga, five

hundred people attended, the great majority of those were youth, they were representatives of youth Non-Government Organizations. A few of them were leaders from those organizations who are older than 25, but a great majority were 25 or under and it was very impressive to see how effectively they could work together; how analytically they were thinking about issues relating to youth; how well they expressed the conclusions of the discussion; and how concrete their proposals were. At the Youth Ministers Conference in Lisbon, the great majority of youth ministers were over 25 but two or three of those were under 25, I am glad to say. In fact, Portugal itself, had quite a young man. He was older than 25 but I think he was probably only about 30, as their youth minister and that is impressive.

LITTLEJOHNS: But a lot of countries don't have such a thing as a youth minister, I mean, how were they represented?

LANGMORE: Normally, there is a youth component of one ministry or another from the United States. Donna Shalala came, for example. She is Secretary for Human Services and Health, I think it is called, and there are similar ministries in many countries, so that ...

LITTLEJOHNS: Well, she is certainly over 25.

LANGMORE: She is significantly over 25, that's true, but she was very committed to youth issues. She brought a representative – young person – from the United States with her who have spoken some of the debates and many delegations did that. They had people from youth groups with them as part of their delegation, officially. So there was very effective representation of youth. It was impressive by the way that representatives of the Braga meeting were able to speak at the opening session of the ministers' meeting and in that sense, they need not worry they are going to cross the recommendations that they have sort out for themselves.

DEEN: Mr. Langmore, one of the major news stories of today is the spreading economic crisis in Asia, Latin America and spreading into the United States. What will be the impact of this crisis on youth and youth programmes?

LANGMORE: It is enormous. Quite clearly in the most crisis-ridden

countries. Tens of millions of people are being driven into poverty, into unemployment. In Indonesia, millions are being forced out of school. Health services are being cut back. There are massive implications for youth in the countries that are experiencing the worst of the crisis in Asia and in Russia.

JENKINS: But in what way are the youth affected more so or whether they were affected differently than adults. In other words, I see some of the things that you talked about at the Conference where that youth-friendly health issue be adopted on issues like HIV AIDS. How does a 24 year old with AIDS, a young man of 24 with AIDS, differ from a young man of 25 with AIDS? I mean, are we not just finding yet another way to vulcanize society to break it down? Why are these young people any different to young adults over the age of 24?

LANGMORE: In many ways, there is no difference at all. The example you gave, there is no difference at all but there are particular needs of young people. Quite clearly, they need education, for example. There are particular kinds of health problems that are particularly common amongst young people. Sexually transmitted diseases, are one type of that problem, suicide is another. And so there are greater vulnerabilities not only to health problems but to psychological problems, economic problems. Young people sometimes have strongly committed families who support them but sometimes they do not. Or sometimes there are problems of abuse even within families that affect young people. So there are identifiable, more intense problems of young people that need a focus of attention.

DEEN: You spoke about the devastating impact of the economic crisis, but is there anything that the UN can do and is it planning to do anything to help them out?

LANGMORE: About the crisis?

DEEN: About the crisis and the impact on youth – unemployment and ...

LANGMORE: That is a very big question, Thalif.

DEEN: Yes.

LANGMORE: But of course, there is lots that the UN can do particularly in conjunction with the Breton Woods Institutions, the World Bank and the International

Monetary Fund. One of the most important thing that happened here in the last three-four weeks is that there has been a recognition of the seriousness of the crisis and some very important discussions about what steps could be taken to try and address the immediate crisis and also to change the structure of the international financial system in ways that would reduce the dangers of such a crisis recurring.

JENKINS: I am sorry, I do not understand. What are the youth specific ways in which the Breton Woods Institutions are addressing this crisis?

LANGMORE: Well, I was really responding to that question in very general terms. There are two dimensions out there. There is the global one if we are going to talk about youth unemployment, for example, then we are going to talk about the total national and global employment opportunities. You cannot address youth unemployment as a whole in isolation from employment questions taken altogether though there are particular elements of it that you can then go on and address as well. So you have to focus both on global and national issues and then within that broader context, on specific youth policies. If you want to concentrate on youth policy in relation to unemployment or in relation to the crisis, then you have to talk about the priority which should be given to education, to training, to job placement schemes, to credit. One of the central problems in this crisis, at every level, is that investors have become risk-adverse and their banks are lucky to make credit less readily available. That is damaging to whole communities, but particularly damaging to youth because in their early 20's, some young people are starting to want to take initiatives to set up small businesses on their own yet they have got very little security, they have got no experience to go to a bank with and say, I am a good credit risk, and so they are the last group that many banks are going to lend to and that compounds the problem for them.

JENKINS: But given the scope of the crisis that face the globe at the moment in the United Nations, the fact that this Organization is so strapped for cash, one of the recommendations that came out of the conference was to create a special rapporteur and there seems to be a proposal for whole new levels of bureaucracy, for more conferences, for more ways of liaison -- is that justified in a global context with all of the issues and

crisis we have around the world?

LANGMORE: Yes, I think it is, but let me answer that perhaps in terms of what did this particular conference achieved, because if this conference was devalued, then others might be as well and the Youth Ministers Conference was the first youth ministers conference that have been held globally even before the first world meeting of youth ministers so it was unique. It therefore created an opportunity for youth ministers to meet and talk and share experience. That was one important benefit. The second even more important benefit was that just the holding of the conference encouraged many countries to develop a youth programmes more than they have done in the past, or to prepare youth strategies, or to give more attention to the concerns of youth, employment or education and training, or target at health services. I think it had the effect of lifting youth up to national political agenda and certainly it did so in the international agenda and since, as Michael said at the beginning, youth is a fifth of humankind, it is very important that they get attention as well as the other groups.

LITTLEJOHNS: John, to what extent did you find that the youth at the conferences in Braga and Lisbon were really engaged with the problems that they faced as a group around the world -- one fifth of humanity, as we pointed out – were they really aware of all the problems that have to be addressed and how engaged were they in the conference?

LANGMORE: Intensely, I would say. The Beta Braga, which was the Conference attended mainly by youth in Seoul was very lively and very engaged, deeply engaged, and I was really impressed by the maturity of a lot of that discussion. They were not just passing resolutions saying the UN should do this or we need more money for that. They were saying, what can we as youth do? How can we organize ourselves better, how can we take more initiative, how can we encourage entrepreneurship amongst young people? In other words, there was a very strong element of self-help as well as a recognition that some of the services can really run effectively if provided by government and they have to go to government for help as well.

LITTLEJOHNS: Were they very negative and critical about older generations of

the way that we older generations have handled the world in our experience?

LANGMORE: There were some of that, of course, as they properly should be. But it was not a protest meeting, it was a very constructive meeting and the really attractive feature of the meeting was the final session when -- which was attended by Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General. The preparation for that have been very well done. The youth had prepared a declaration as a result of very careful work -- some of them stayed up all night to do it -- and they were able to present that to him. It was a very emotional occasion. He spoke with great fluency and eloquence really and with some emotion and they responded enormously, warmly, standing ovation. It was really quite an exciting event.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is John Langmore, Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development at the United Nations.

DEEN: If I can shift the focus -- the United Nations is very, very seriously concerned about the growing new phenomenon of child soldiers. What are your views on these.

LANGMORE: Well, these are very serious problem. It was not a problem that got a lot of attention at either these conferences. They were more about the central policies and activities relating to youth but they did get some attention and certainly, there was hostility to the young people serving in national forces as of course there was to land mines and various other forms of exploitation.

DEEN: And UNICEF is pretty much involved in this whole exercise trying to prevent children being recruited in armies.

LANGMORE: They are indeed and they had a large delegation at the meeting yesterday -- a number of the UN agencies and certainly they would have been unanimous, as far as I recall, opposition to young people serving in military forces.

JENKINS: For a number of countries, already by age fifteen you are no longer a child. There is no intervening phase of being a youth. You pass from being a child to being an adult. Was that issue addressed at all, I mean the different cultural attitudes to what is a youth, or what is a child and an adult?

LANGMORE: Yes, it was and there of course is an added complexity in the

concept of youth. Some people are parents by the time they are fifteen and so of course, they don't have that pleasure of a period before they take on the responsibilities of parenthood. Nevertheless, they have need for education and health services, for employment opportunities, for the kind of support from society and perhaps, they have an even greater need for those things, if they take on parental responsibilities or other responsibilities of the military kind when they are very young.

JENKINS: So what can the UN do as a global organization to contribute to the policy debate? Is the UN throwing this just to be an international talking shop? There is an awful lot of a field good rhetoric that came out of this. I think you will recognize a lot of politically correct language and you said that it was a forum where people got together to speak but I am not sure, what is the UN's role? What would the special rapporteur do?

LANGMORE: I think the principal benefit of the UN conference on youth, as in many others, is it provides a talking shop and it is very valuable for youth ministers from range of countries to come together and share experience and in their speeches and in their private conversations, I know. They talked about what they are attempting to do in some detail with some precision and what was working and what was not working, the problems they that they had in raising the funds they needed to do what they wanted to do, how you address that problem, how they dealt with the political debate in their own countries. I mean education ministers are always struggling within national budgets and with their finance ministers to increase the amount that is allocated for education and similarly for health services and to talk about how you cope with those political struggles at home is a very valuable activity. Can the UN go further than that? It could if it had funds to allocate to particular maybe countries to provide seed money for projects. We have a small amount of that money. We give tiny contributions to a few places where interesting experiments are being attempted. There is talk about expanding the rights area -- to talk about youth rights and the first step in that approach is to get a listing, a careful listing, of all the rights that affect you and that is underway.

LITTLEJOHNS: We already have the convention on the rights of the child.

LANGMORE: Exactly.

LITTLEJOHNS: So you want something for an older group?

LANGMORE: I am not sure if we do, but that possibility was suggested by a number of delegates and so it needs to be explored to see whether it is worth it or not. It can be argued that youth are young adults and their rights should may be no different from those of other adults and I think there is quite a cause to be made from that. You do not want to multiply the number of conventions unnecessarily. So that issue has to be discussed.

LITTLEJOHNS: The United Nations is largely an organization of the middle aged and the older. The average age of the Secretariat is quite high, as well, up on the forties, I think. I wonder how sympathetic really an organization like this is to the interests and aspirations of the group we are talking about?

LANGMORE: Very. I think the presence of the Secretary-General at both conferences ....

LITTLEJOHNS: But the Secretary-General is sixty years old.

LANGMORE: Yes, but the fact that he chose to attend at considerable cost to himself – he had to deal with Iraq the day before he came here, he flew overnight in order to speak in the morning – which was a very clear expression of his dedication to the issue, the fact that within the youth unit we do have young people but we need more, of course. I think there is a great conceptual sympathy – it would be better if there were more young people working in the Secretariat and if UN's funds were not so severely constrained and improperly constrained at present, then we would be able to recruit more young people and it is very important that as soon as possible that difficulty in recruiting young people be ended.

DEEN: Mr. Langmore, there is an ongoing controversy over the merits and demerits of UN sanctions. How do you think the UN sanctions impact on children say in a country like, youth and children, in a country like Iraq.

LANGMORE: There was quite a lot of debate about that question and Iraq put very strongly the case that the sanctions are having a very damaging impact on young people and there was, of course, a strong support for that and strong expression of

skepticism about it as well. There does not seem to be any doubt that sanctions do have a damaging impact on whole populations. But the problem is what does the International Community do which makes its position clear with minimal damage. So that issue of sanctions is a complex and difficult one and the Youth Conference was not the place to deal with that in detail.

LITTLEJOHNS: Did Cuba mention the sanction -- the embargo -- by the United States?

LANGMORE: I think they did.

DEEN: The UNICEF has proposed what they call a child impact assessment whenever sanctions are being implemented. Did this come up at your Conference?

LANGMORE: I do not remember that particular concept.

JENKINS: This debate, it seems to me, gets back to the fundamentals as to whether we should be talking about. This is a discreet set, because we are talking about the impact on children. I think everybody recognizes that children do suffer from malnutrition and lack of medical services as a result of sanctions but in what way do youth, who have gone through puberty – post puberty -- suffer in any way different to the rest of the adult population? I am still not clear on that – it makes sense to divide everybody up in this way.

LANGMORE: Given that, there has to be a degree of streaming in debates within the UN. The Youth Conference was not the appropriate place to deal with that very complex political and economic problem in-depth even though some delegation would have quite liked to have, but it could not be handled appropriately. But there are major areas of public policy and major areas of social life which focussed on youth and it is appropriate I think to deal with those in a discreet way. Just for example, the whole issue of universal primary education is very important but so is the issue of the proportion of education expenditure which should be on secondary education. It is secondary education and post-secondary education that really affect youth and there are major debates within many countries who are constrained in that level of expenditure that they can make as to how much should go into those high levels of education and that was a very appropriate

issue for there to be a discussion of that. That is just one example.

LITTLEJOHNS: John, can you mention some countries that you consider to be good examples as far as their youth policy is concerned?

LANGMORE: That's a good question, I mean, many countries came with a quite detailed statements, even publications, about what they were doing with their youth programmes.

LITTLEJOHNS: In the Northern Countries, and they're often leaders, are they prominent in their youth programmes?

LANGMORE: They are and some of them -- leaders at the youth meeting in Braga who were very impressive -- were from the Northern Countries. But Portugal itself, the host country, gives youth a great deal of attention and they have a very active youth policy. And the Chinese delegation articulated a great many aspects of their policy. One of the impressive things about the Chinese statement was the way in which they were enabling youth to make a contribution to society by mobilizing them to help on public projects or in care of older people or in other very socially useful activities and that is a good lesson for lots of countries to draw on.

LITTLEJOHNS: But the Chinese leadership is not exactly youthful.

LANGMORE: No, but that does not -- I mean that they don't have a very responsible approach to the participation of youth in public policy and society as a whole.

DEEN: UN has several trust funds for the advancement of women and they also have several divisions dealing with women. Do you have any similar trust funds and divisions for youth?

LANGMORE: Yes, there's a Youth Unit in the Social Division and there's a trust fund for work on youth, yes.

JENKINS: Is the focus on youth now a symptom of the fact that the battle to improve the lot of children is starting to be won? That more are getting immunized against disease, infant mortality rates are falling around the world, we can afford now to focus a little bit more on youth?

LANGMORE: No, I don't think it is -- I hope that that's true. Actually, what

the focus on youth is the result of, in part, is the end of the Cold War. Youth's affair used to be a particularly vigorous battleground between West and East during the Cold War and that led to the repression of international activities on youth. With the end of the Cold War and the end of that ideological contest, it has been possible for all countries to combine, at last, in shared activities on youth. And that is why, I think, more than anything, it was possible to hold this meeting.

LITTLEJOHNS: John, we have only a few seconds left. You mentioned the constraints -- financial constraints -- on the UN. How much is the UN investing in this youth programme?

LANGMORE: Request staff of four people in the Youth Unit -- I mean it is tiny, absolutely tiny and, of course, many other agencies -- UNICEF, UNFPA and other UN agencies -- are also concentrating on youth.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Langmore, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle.**

Our guest has been John Langmore, Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development at the United Nations. He was interviewed by Thalif Deen of *Inter Press Service* and Tony Jenkins of *Expresso* of Portugal. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle.**